



Fisherman at Lamphier Lake

— photo by Gnurps

Fossil Ridge — the “heart of Gunnison”

Fossil Ridge is one of Colorado's wildest, loveliest and most important Wilderness Study Areas. Its 55,000 acres lie in the heart of the Gunnison Country and have been under consideration for wilderness for over a decade. The area clearly qualifies as wilderness and plays an important role in the local recreation economy. The Friends of Fossil Ridge have been working since 1982 to persuade the U.S. Congress to designate it as official wilderness. In the current 1987-88 Congressional session, preservation again has a chance. We need your help!

HISTORY

- First considered for wilderness in early 1970s during the US Forest Service “Roadless Area and Review” (RARE) process;

- U.S. Senate voted for a Fossil Ridge Wilderness in 1979; but U.S. House disagreed;

- Compromise: In 1980 Congress designated Fossil Ridge as a Wilderness Study Area;

- New study released by USFS in 1983 recommending against wilderness;

- Included as wilderness in 1984 Congressional compromise, but entire Colorado wilderness bill died; proposed boundaries would lop off southern side of Fossil Ridge.

- 1984 to present: Controversy over wilderness water rights holds up Colorado wilderness bill.

- Conservationists and water developers are now negotiating a compromise over the wilderness water rights issue.

The Friends of Fossil Ridge are working to see that the next Colorado Wilderness bill includes Fossil

Ridge with satisfactory boundaries.

WHY WILDERNESS?

- **Fossils:** Paleozoic sea fossils thrust above timberline...

...a spectacular display!

- **Wildness:** The US Forest Service (USFS) rates Fossil Ridge as one of the wildest places in Colorado; over 50 miles of trails and 20 miles of above-timberline hiking; exquisite panorama of four surrounding mountain ranges (the Elks, West Elks, San Juans and Sawatch).

- **Wildlife:** The Colorado Division of Wildlife has stated that Fossil Ridge is crucial to a migrating herd of over 1000 elk and many deer. Fossil Ridge is home for two dozen magnificent mountain goats. Also

habitat for black bear, mountain lion, many small mammals and occasional bighorn sheep.

- **Fishing:** Seven subalpine lakes at altitudes over 11,000 feet surround the ridge, all with excellent fishing; plus fishing in several wild creeks.

Non-wilderness would lead to decreased fishing quality, according to USFS.

- **Outfitters:** Three commercial outfitters take hunters, fishermen and other visitors into Fossil Ridge, providing economic benefits to the local economy.

- **Education:** Fossil Ridge has been used for biological and geological field research by Western State College and the University of Minnesota; WSC backpacking classes and annual use by WSC ski team for

In wildness is preservation of the world

"heart of Gunnison"

Ridge with satisfactory boundaries.

WHY WILDERNESS?

• **Fossils:** Paleozoic sea fossils thrust above timberline...
...a spectacular display!

• **Wildness:** The US Forest Service (USFS) rates Fossil Ridge as one of the wildest places in Colorado; over 50 miles of trails and 20 miles of above-timberline hiking; exquisite panorama of four surrounding mountain ranges (the Elks, West Elks, San Juans and Sawatch).

• **Wildlife:** The Colorado Division of Wildlife has stated that Fossil Ridge is crucial to a migrating herd of over 1000 elk and many deer. Fossil Ridge is home for two dozen magnificent mountain goats. Also

habitat for black bear, mountain lion, many small mammals and occasional bighorn sheep.

• **Fishing:** Seven subalpine lakes at altitudes over 11,000 feet surround the ridge, all with excellent fishing; plus fishing in several wild creeks.

Non-wilderness would lead to decreased fishing quality, according to USFS.

• **Outfitters:** Three commercial outfitters take hunters, fishermen and other visitors into Fossil Ridge, providing economic benefits to the local economy.

• **Education:** Fossil Ridge has been used for biological and geological field research by Western State College and the University of Minnesota; WSC backpacking classes and annual use by WSC ski team for

training; outfitters bring schools and Boy Scouts in for wilderness education.

• **Easy access:** Unlike many wilderness areas which are difficult to get to, Fossil Ridge offers easy access. From the paved Taylor Road adjacent to the north boundary, five minutes of hiking brings you into deep, virgin wilderness. The Gold Creek road on the south side offers similarly easy access to three wilderness trails.

• **Watershed:** Fossil Ridge annually yields 50,000 acre-feet of "extremely high quality" water which could be damaged by non-wilderness status, according to USFS. No water projects are proposed for Fossil Ridge, nor are there any conflicts with other users' water rights. The limestone bedrock gives Fossil Ridge rivers and lakes a resistivity to acid rain pollution, so the area can serve

as a research sight on this important problem. Should air in the West become more fouled, Fossil Ridge might remain clean.

• **Economic benefits:** Hunting and fishing in Fossil Ridge bring about \$1 million of economic activity to Gunnison county. Additional benefits from hikers, climbers, cross-country skiers and horseback riders have not been calculated. The towns of Pitkin and Crested Butte have endorsed wilderness designation because of its potential economic benefits.

OPPOSITION TO WILDERNESS

• **Minerals:** The USFS has recommended against wilderness status mainly because of the area's alleged

continued on other side

In wildness is preservation of the world

Haven to elk and mountain goats, fantastic fishing, great views!

continued from other side

mineral values. During the mineral boom of the late 1970s, a few mining companies explored the area looking for gold, uranium and high quality limestone. No economic deposits were found. In recent years, there has been no mineral exploration at all in Fossil Ridge.

The value of recreation to Gunnison County has dramatically increased in the 1980s, while mining has decreased to nearly zero economic benefit. Mineral development and recreation are not compatible, so mining in Fossil Ridge could have a significant negative affect on the local economy.

Some mineral value may indeed lie under Fossil Ridge. The fossiliferous limestone is known to be of high quality. Mining that limestone would also destroy the fossils. Fossil Ridge is visible from many locations on both major highways in Gunnison County, so an open-pit mine at high altitude could degrade the visual experience of tourists who don't even visit Fossil Ridge.

Finally, should an unknown future mineral possibility automatically outweigh a known, present benefit from wilderness?

• **Motorcycles:** Despite the 1980 Congressional designation as a Wilderness Study Area, the US Forest Service has been allowing motorcycles on Fossil Ridge trails. Should Fossil Ridge become non-wilderness, the agency plans to manage all trails for intensive use by motorcycles. This would effectively preclude use by hikers and horseback riders, thus harming the existing operations of the three commercial outfitters. (The local and statewide outfitters' associations have endorsed wilderness designation.)

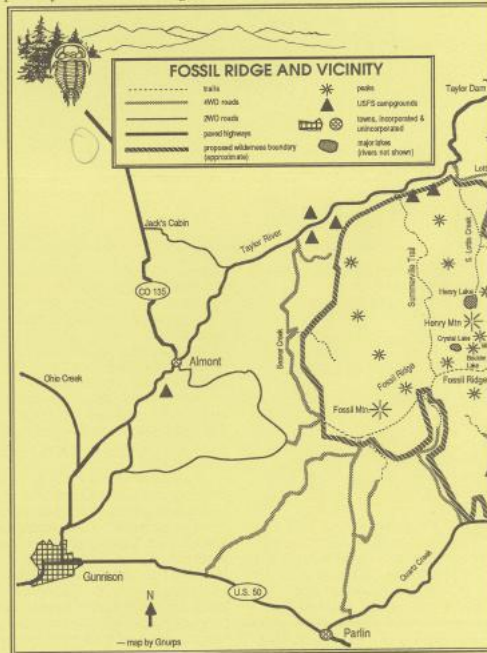
Motorcycles are an immediate threat to Fossil Ridge because they have been riding off the trails onto sensitive tundra. It may take hundreds of years for tundra to recover from just one motorcycle passage.

Motorcycles also have been cutting the corners on trail switchbacks, increasing erosion and the costs of trail maintenance.

• **Ranching:** Some local ranchers have opposed wilderness, but in fact their operations would be unaffected. The Congress has specifically demanded that any wilderness designation must have no affect on grazing. Congress has even given ranchers privileges of motorized access into wilderness unavailable to other users.

• **Boundary compromise:** One proposal by Senator Armstrong

would lop most of the south side of Fossil Ridge out of the designated wilderness. This would allow mining of the limestone and motorcycle travel on the Fossil Ridge Trail. Motorcyclists would then have easy access to open tundra and could easily enter the wilderness boundary. This would cut out some valuable habitat for deer and elk, who enjoy the warmer south-facing slopes. It would seriously harm the quality of trips offered by the outfitters' who need to travel via the southern side to get between north-side drainages.



What you can do

• Write your Congressmen

If you live in his district, write Representative Ben Nighthorse Campbell, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. If you live anywhere in Colorado, write Senators Tim Wirth and Bill Armstrong, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20515. If you live in another Colorado district or another state, write your own Congressmen. Tell them about Fossil Ridge and ask them to speak with Campbell, Wirth or Armstrong.



Points to make in your letter:

• Ask that they quickly introduce a wilderness bill including Fossil Ridge. We've waited since 1983 for passage of this legislation

• Stress that the bill should include all 55,000 acres, especially the southern half of the area. Senator Armstrong has proposed excluding that half to allow use by motorcycles and miners. Point out the importance of the southern side of the ridge: its value to wildlife, hikers, integrity of the area, affect on outfitters. Express support for the boundaries proposed by the Friends of Fossil Ridge.

• Support strong language in the bill protecting wilderness water.

• If you have visited Fossil Ridge, or have any feelings about the issues or the area, describe that experience or feeling. Personal letters have more value than form letters.

• Contact the Gunnison County Commissioners

Call or write the Gunnison County Commissioners. Stress the economic importance of wilderness to our recreation economy. Commissioner Fred Field is especially important. Ask that he reconsider his earlier position against wilderness. Address: Gunnison County Court-

house, Gunnison, CO 81230.

You may also write or speak to your town or city council members. Ask that they endorse Fossil Ridge for wilderness designation.

• Join or contact the Friends of Fossil Ridge

Membership is \$20, or \$12 for student/low income. Money will be used for distributing information like this sheet and for lobbying the Congressmen. Send membership payments or donations to the letterhead address. Or call one of our board members:

Rudy Rudibaugh, president:
641-0666

Ramon Reed, vice-president:
641-1704

Frank Coleman, treasurer:
641-4076

Gary Sprung, secretary:
349-5439

John Nelson, spokesman:
641-2830

• Visit Fossil Ridge and tell your friends about Fossil Ridge

Need more information?

Call Gary Sprung, secretary of the Friends of Fossil Ridge, at 303/349-5439 or write him at Box 46, Parlin, CO 81239.

Friends of Fossil Ridge membership form

I am enclosing: \$20 for regular membership
 \$12 for student/low income membership
 additional contribution of _____
 I would like to help. Please contact me.

Name _____

Street _____

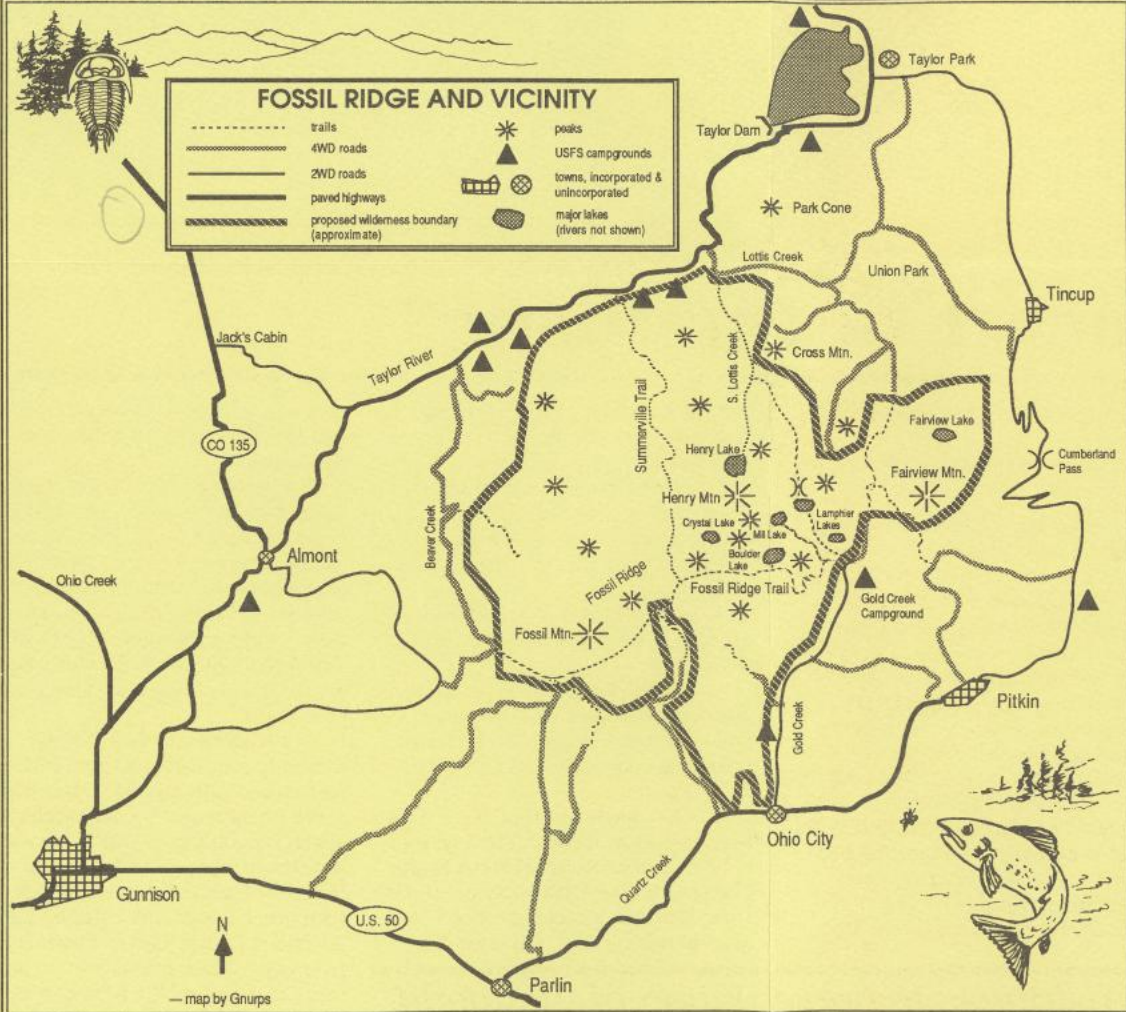
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____



FOSSIL RIDGE AND VICINITY

- trails
- - - - - 4WD roads
- ===== 2WD roads
- ===== paved highways
- ===== proposed wilderness boundary (approximate)
- * peaks
- ▲ USFS campgrounds
- 🏠 towns, incorporated & unincorporated
- 🌊 major lakes (rivers not shown)



— map by Gnrups





Friends of Fossil Ridge

PO Box 46
Parlin, CO 81239